

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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DPW-01 RSR-01 /094 W

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P R 181615 Z JUN 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3374

INFO AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

USDEL JEC PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 10925

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, VS

SUBJECT: THE FOUR SLATES IN THE UPPER HOUSE ELECTION: A
PRELIMINARY ASSESMENT.

1. AFTER A WEEK OF CONCENTRATED BARGAINING AMONG POLITICAL GROUPS IN SAIGON, FOUR SLATES EMERGED JUNE 17 IN THE FIRST POSTING FOR THE UPPER HOUSE ELECTION. SLATE LISTINGS ARE REPORTED SEPTEL. UNLESS TWO OF THEM FAIL TO STAY IN THE RACE LATER ON, THIS ASSURES A FORMALLY CONTESTED ELECTION AND THUS AVIODS THE IMPASSE THAT AROSE IN THE ONE- MAN 1971 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

2. HOWEVER, THIS ELECTION WILL PROBABLY NOT ESCAPE THE 1971 STIGMA TOTALLY, BECAUSE THE " DEMOCRACY" AND " WHITE ELEPHANT" SLATES APPEAR MARKEDLY STRONGER THAN THE OTHER TWO. SEVERAL OPPOSITION AND INDEPENDENT POLITICIANS ALREADY POINT TO THEM AS THE OBVIOUS WINNERS, DISMISSING THE OTHERS AS EFFORTS BY THE ADMINISTRATION TO PROVIDE A COLORING OF COMPETITION. THESE CRITICS REINFORCE THEIR VIEW- POINT BY NOTING THE ADMINISTRATION' S REFUSAL TO ALLOW MORE TIME TO CREATE SLATES BEFORE THE DEADLINE.

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UNFORTUNATELY, REPORTS OF UNSUCCESSFUL LAST MINUTE NEGOTIATIONS TO FORGE ADDITIONAL SLATES AND THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF THE FOUR SLATES THEMSELVES LEND CREDENCE TO THESE ARGUMENTS.

3. THE " DEMOCRACY" SLATE IS UNIVERSALLY RECOGNIZED AS THE FORMAL DEMOCRACY PARTY LIST. ITS LEADER, HEALTH MINISTER TRAN MINH TUNG, WAS A CO- FOUNDER OF THE DP. THE THREE INCUMBENT SENATORS ON THE LIST (LE VAN DONG, PHAM NHU PHEN, AND TRAN TRUNG DUNG) ARE PARTY STALWARTS, AND SEVERAL OTHERS HAVE VISIBLE CONNECTIONS WITH THE ADMINISTRATION.

4. THE " WHITE ELEPHANT" SLATE LED BY FOREIGN MINISTER TRAN VAN LAM IS LINKED LESS TIGHTLY TO THE DP, BUT LAM HIMSELF, INCUMBENT SENATOR DOAN VAN CUU, AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR LEGISLATIVE LIAISON CAO VAN TUONG ARE IDENTIFIED AS PARTY MEMBERS. NO WELL KNOWN NON- DP POLITICAL FIGURES ARE PRESENT TO BALANCE THIS ORIENTATION.

5. THE " SHEAF OF RICE" SLATE AND THE " POPULAR SELF- DETERMINATION" SLATE DO NOT CONTAIN WELL KNOWN PERSONALITIES. NO BIOGRAPHIC DATE IS AVAILABLE ON MR. BUI BINH BAN, THE " SHEAF OF RICE" LEADER. SOME EMBASSY CONTACTS IDENTIFY HIM AS A COLLEAGUE OF RD MINISTER NGUYEN VAN NGAI IN THE LATTER' S FORMER PARTY, THE VIETNAM DEMOCRATIC FORCE. THE " POPULAR SELF- DETERMINATION" LEADER IS BETTER KNOWN, HAVING HEADED (WITH MR. CHAU VAN HAI, ON THE SAME SLATE) A PARTY ASSOCIATED WITH THE DISABLEDSVETERANS. THREE MEMBERS OF THIS SLATE RAN FOR THE HPPER HOUSE IN 1970 ON THE SLATE THAT FINISHED TENTH IN A FIELD OF SIXTEEN.

6. LAST- MINUTE BARGAINING.
SAIGON 10793 REPORTED AN EFFORT BY SENATOR DANG VAN SUNG TO CREATE A SLATE COMBINING SEVERAL INDEPENDENT PERSONALITIES, SOME SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE MEMBERS, AND DP REPRESENTATIVES. IN A CONVERSATION WITH AN EMBASSY OFFICER JUNE 18, SUNG SAID THAT RD MINISTER NGAI APPROACHED HIM EARLY JUNE 16 WITH A REQUEST FROM PRESIDENT THIEU TO " FORM A SLATE". SUNG TRIED TO DO SO, PUTTING HIMSELF, EX- AMBASSADOR BUI DIEM, SENATOR PAULINE THO, AND SOME SDA FIGURES ON THE LIST. FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS, NOTABLY HIS INABILITY TO CONTACT SDA LEADER TRAN QUOC BUU FOR CLEARANCE IN THE LIMITED TIME AVAILABLE, THE EFFORT FELL
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THROUGH. AS SUNG DESCRIBED IT, NGAI THEN FELL BACK ON THE ALTERNATIVE MEANS THAT FINALLY SUCCEEDED IN COMING UP WITH NON- DP SLATES.

7. REPORTEDLY, BUU AND THE SDA HAD ALREADY DECIDED AGAINST A STRICTLY SDA SLATE, AND THEY WERE LITTLE INCLINED TO SEEK AN ALLIANCE WITH OTHER GROUPS BECAUSE OF THE APPARENT HOPELESSNESS

OF FIGHTING THE DP. AN APPROACH TO THEM BY THE CATHOLIC-ORIENTED FREEDOM PARTY GOT NOWHERE, ENDING A WEEK OF UNSUCCESSFUL PROBES IN VARIOUS DIRECTIONS BY FREEDOM PARTY ORGANIZERS (PROBES THAT WE ARE TOLD INCLUDED EVEN NGUYEN CAO KY AS POTENTIAL LEADER OF A CATHOLIC- BUDDHIST SLATE, UNTIL KY REJECTED THE IDEA).

8. REASONS FOR THE RESULT.

THE DISARRAY OF INDEPENDENT AND OPPOSITION FIGURES IN THE FACE OF DECREE LAW 060 AND DP ORGANIZING PRESSURE HAS BEEN KNOWN FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. BUT WITH THE PRESIDENT' S RECENT CONCESSION CONCERNING DL 060 IN THE ELECTION LAW, IT WAS THOUGH THAT AT LEAST SOME WOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO ENTER THE ELECTORAL RACE. THE CRITICAL MOVEMENT WAS FORSEEN FOR LATER, AS THE ADMINISTRATION' S INTENTIONS FOR A FAIR ELECTION BECAME VISIBLE. THEIR FAILURE EVEN TO PRESENT SLATES SHOWS A MORE DEEP- SEATED UNWILLINGNESS TO TEST THE ADMINISTRATION' S INTENTIONS. FOUR REASONS CAN BE SEEN FOR THIS RESULT:

(A) THE UNCERTAINTY OF SOUTH VIETNAM' S CONSTITUTIONAL FUTURE AS NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE COMMUNISTS CONTINUE. SINCE IT COSTS MUCH MONEY TO RUN FOR THE UPPER HOUSE, MANY POLITICIANS DOUBTED THE WISDOM OF SEEKING WHAT COULD BE A BRIEF MANDATE.
(B) THE BASIC INABILITY OF THE OPPOSITION AND INDEPENDENT GROUPS TO GET TOGETHER. THIS WEAKNESS PREVENTED POWERFUL COMBINATIONS THAT COULD CHALLENGE THE DP.
(C) THE DP' S STRONG POSITION NATIONWIDE COMPARED TO ALL OTHER GROUPS. COMPETING AGAINST THE DP SEEMED USELESS.
(D) THE SHORTNESS OF THE FILING DEADLINE. ALTHOUGH THIS WAS SELDOM EMPHASIZED AFTER THE PRIME MINISTER' S MID- SEEK DECREE RELAXING DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS, IT HAD ALREADY REINFORCED PRE- EXISTING DOUBTS ABOUT THE ADMINISTRATION' S INTENTIONS AND THUS PARTLY NULLIFIED EFFECT OF THE DL060 CONCESSION. THE ADMINISTRATION' S LEGAL ARGUMENTS FOR ADHERING TO THE LAW' S SCHEDULE ARE DEBATABLE, BUT SINCE THE DEADLINE WAS IN THE ORIGINAL BILL THE POLITICIANS IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, IF NOT

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OTHERS, WHOULF HAVE BEEN MINDFUL OF IT MONTHS AGO. IN A SENSE, THEREFORE, THIS WAS AN EXCUSE RATHER THAN A REASON FOR WHAT OCCURRED. HOWEVER, EPISODES SUCH AS THAT DESCRIBED ABOVE INVOLVING SENATOR SUNG SUGGEST THAT THE DEADLINE DID HAMPER SLATE- FORMING EFFORTS TO SOME EXTENT.
WHITEHOUSE

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